

NEWS RELEASE

North Dakota Department of Health News Release

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For More Information, Contact:

Loreeta Leer Frank

Public Information Officer

North Dakota Department of Health

Phone: 701.328.1665 (office)

701.400.4619 (cell phone)

E-mail: rfrank@state.nd.us

Public and Private Health-Care Providers Meet To Address Vaccine Shortage in North Dakota

BISMARCK – State Health Officer Terry Dwelle today commended the state’s public and private health-care community for its assistance in addressing the influenza vaccine shortage in North Dakota.

Representatives of hospitals, physicians, pharmacies, long-term care and state and local public health met today to discuss the vaccine shortfall and the potential redistribution of vaccine to areas with critical shortages.

“This year’s influenza vaccine season will be a challenge to all of us in North Dakota,” Dwelle said. “I appreciate the commitment of the state’s public and private health-care community to work together to address this challenge. We in North Dakota have a long tradition of helping our neighbors in need. I’m confident we can work together this year to minimize the impact of the vaccine shortage on our most vulnerable citizens.”

The national vaccine shortage has caused a critical shortfall in the amount of vaccine available in North Dakota. In fact, public and private health-care providers in the state have only about half the vaccine needed to cover all North Dakotans in the high-risk groups identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition, some areas of the state report little if any vaccine.

Each year, more than 90 percent of influenza deaths in North Dakota occur among people age 65 and older, two-thirds of whom have chronic illnesses known to increase the risk of dying from influenza. As a result, the North Dakota Department of Health and infectious disease physicians across the state are encouraging people with chronic medical conditions to receive their flu shots as soon as they are available locally.

Many nursing-home residents are chronically ill and often can’t visit their private doctors to receive flu shots. This year, local public health units across the state have agreed to assist with private-sector efforts to vaccinate nursing home residents.

“We recognize the importance of vaccinating as many people as possible in all the CDC-identified risk groups,” Dwelle said. “In order for there to be enough vaccine to reach chronically ill patients across the

state, however, some redistribution of vaccine to shortage areas is necessary. I'm encouraged by the response of the state's health-care community during today's meeting."

The following are the high-risk groups as identified by the CDC:

- All children age 6 to 23 months
- Adults age 65 and older
- People age 2 to 64 who have chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney failure or HIV or who are receiving chemotherapy
- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Children age 6 months to 18 years on chronic aspirin therapy
- Health-care workers involved in direct patient care
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children younger than 6 months of age

People who are not in a high-risk group are being asked to forgo flu shots this year.

Local public health units and private health-care providers are working together to develop plans for vaccinating high-risk individuals in their areas. Vaccination plans may vary across the state. Further information about influenza vaccine availability will be provided by local health-care providers.

-- 30 --

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